

Local Housekeepers Are **GREEN HEROES**

By Jason Soeda

Hotel housekeeping crews are more eco-conscious than ever. In this report, we examine the various ways Hawaii housekeepers are contributing to a greener and cleaner Hawaii!



(Counterclockwise from top) Gary Nushida straps on a HEPA backpack vacuum to clean the carpets inside of Washington Place; Carleton Yanaga and volunteers from Team Clean, Inc. focus on lanai railings and walls; Pauline Galera and her team from the Aston Waikiki Banyan use green cleaning techniques on Washington Place's rare koa baby grand piano.

To shed some light on this topic, we decided to reach out to one of the best cleaning professionals in the business, Rose Galera, president of the Hawaii chapter of the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA). We contacted her first since she has more than 50 years of experience in the housekeeping and cleaning industries. What's more, Galera is our in-house expert on these topics and author of Hawaii Hospitality's "Clean Talk with Rose" advice column.

According to Galera, IEHA makes year-round efforts to keep its members up to date with green cleaning technologies, products and practices. The purpose of these efforts, she says, is to create "cleaner, safer and healthier Hawaii hotels."

So let's ask the IEHA president herself: How green is Hawaii's hotel housekeeping industry? As always, she pulls no punches when it comes to this topic. Galera responds, "I believe that Hawaii's hospitality housekeeping industry still has much to accomplish in the movement towards going green."

To illustrate her point, Galera mentions the use of microfiber cleaning technology, which is recognized throughout the industry for its numerous green benefits.

For example, she says, microfiber products are extremely effective and clean with less effort than traditional methods and without the need of additional chemicals. Furthermore, microfiber products can reduce cross-contamination and greatly reduce water usage, which helps both the environment and a hotel's bottom line.

"Though many hotel housekeeping departments have adopted the microfiber cleaning technology with cleaning cloths and flat mops, the full green application of microfiber technology has not been fully applied as I've noted happening in the healthcare industry to a higher degree," says Galera.

Going green does not mean sacrificing cleanliness and comfort and guest satisfaction, says Galera. Fortunately, she says, there are many hotel industry leaders in Hawaii who understand that being green can actually help them to save money, operate more efficiently and even attract more guests. To help promote this, Galera organizes professional cleaning workshops that teach Hawaii housekeepers about eco-friendly practices and natural cleaning products that are non-toxic, biodegradable, renewable and sustainable.

"Green cleaning helps Hawaii guests

to stay healthy and safe, and protects the health of employees, too," Galera says. "It also increases the lifespan of facilities and preserves our environment."

Gary Nushida, past IEHA Hawaii chapter president and a very active board member, is in agreement with Galera. We asked him if he is eager to dispel the old-fashioned misconception that cleaning products need to be packed with strong chemicals to be effective. His belief is, if professional cleaners have the opportunity to replace traditional cleaning agents with products that are non-toxic, biodegradable, and made from renewable resources, it simply makes sense to go for it.

At the recent Hawaii Lodging, Hospitality & Foodservice Expo, Nushida noticed a sharp increase in exhibitors who were dropping buzzwords such as: "environmental," "green" and "sustainability." Whether their motivation stems from competition or a genuine desire to save the environment, he says that one thing is obvious — the local hospitality industry is definitely moving in the right direction.

"In the last five years, I think Hawaii has really embraced the concept of green cleaning," says Nushida.

IEHA GOES TO WASHINGTON (PLACE, THAT IS)

IEHA Hawaii chapter performs quarterly cleanups of Washington Place, which was once the residence of Queen Liliuokalani, the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian islands. The cleanup is one of the many ways the organization gives back to the community.

Because Washington Place is designated as a National Historic Landmark (it was Queen Liliuokalani's home for 55 years), green cleaning techniques are a necessity in this environment.

According to Galera, the community service project team uses microfiber cloths to clean and polish the palace's delicate surfaces, including its ceilings, windows and walls. Furthermore, several team members strap on special vacuum cleaners with HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters to clean high areas and the floors.

"Chemicals are used on a very limited basis, mainly for the restrooms," adds Gary Nushida, who organizes IEHA's local community service projects.

The cleanup team also needed to be careful with the variety of finely carved furniture inside of Washington Place, including one particular koa baby grand piano, which is one of only a handful that were ever made. According to IEHA Hawaii, green cleaning processes and microfiber cloths were used on this antique.

Nushida says Washington Place didn't specifically request green cleaning services, but obviously, Queen Liliuokalani's palace is one of those places where harsh chemicals are a definite no-no. Fortunately, IEHA Hawaii's community cleanup teams have years of training and experience to handle these delicate environments. After all, the state's best hotels have served as their training grounds.

Nushida, who is the executive housekeeper for Hawaii Prince Hotel Waikiki and Golf Club, has lots of experience in this area. "Occasionally, there are guests who come to Hawaii hotels requesting that absolutely no chemicals of any kind be used in their rooms. They want us to clean with just water."

All in all, Nushida says, he and his fellow housekeepers enjoy discovering new ways to clean green. And projects like Washington Place are great opportunities to put what they've learned into practice.

"Besides, it's fun just to give back to the community," he says. 

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